

Editor's pick

The year is 2030. The scene is the attic of an old home on a winter weekend.

"Hey Grandpa, look here. It's an old copy of one of those reading magazines. This one has the label '*wjm*' on the cover."

"Oh yeah, look at that. We used to call these 'medical journals.' It was how doctors like your grandfather kept up to date with new developments."

"Wow. But the magazine — how did it get to you?"

"Well, there used to be people who were called letter carriers. Their job was to deliver things like this right to your home."

"Weird. And then you'd need to read the entire thing?"

"Well, most people flipped through the thing looking for the good parts. . . ."

What will become of the medical journal in the next few years? Clearly, as a source for disseminating research findings, it is slow, awkward, and outdated. Today, an author submits an article and it is sent out electronically for peer review. Usually several weeks later, the reviews are in hand and the editors decide whether or not to publish the article. Accepted articles enter the long queue for pub-

lication space that, for some journals, may not be available for a year.

Why should the medical profession or the public wait for research results? Is it to ensure the authors are credited with a prize publication? It certainly isn't to allow for higher quality or more careful and thorough dissemination. Long waits should be eliminated. In the future, peer-reviewed articles should be available immediately using the Internet.

But then what role does and will the printed medical journal play? For health professionals and students, reading journals like *wjm* gives them a sense of belonging to a group of like-minded people. They can reflect on current medical practice and read how others approach problems, frustrations, and moral dilemmas. When schedules are tight and hours are long, the journal is both an educational tool and enjoyable refreshment that can be carried in the briefcase or even slipped into a computer bag and accessed easily, on demand.

Perhaps the traditional print journal as a repository for research has a short life expectancy. But I suspect that journals that offer added value, stimulate reflection, and are fun to read will be around, maybe even until 2030.